

Information Brief For Citizens' Efficiency Commission

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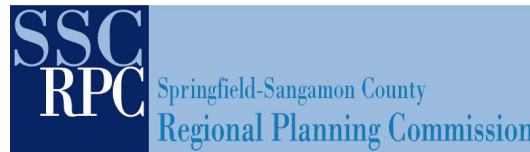
Key findings:

Based upon the Illinois Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation's 2003 review of special districts in Illinois, of the 36 types of special districts identified:

- Five types were specific to the Chicago and Metro East area, and therefore not applicable to Sangamon County.
- Of the 31 remaining types, Sangamon County hosted 11. This is in comparison to three benchmark counties, Champaign, McLean and Peoria, which hosted 11, 13 and 13, respectively.
- In terms of the total number of special districts encompassed by these 31 types, Sangamon County hosted 44, almost the same as Peoria County (42), and far less than Champaign (128) and McLean (83) counties.

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Special Districts: A Comparison of Their Use in Sangamon County with Three Other Illinois Counties

Background

The Citizens' Efficiency Commission (CEC) for Sangamon County, created by referendum in 2010, was established to recommend actions to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local government in Sangamon County. As part of their review, commissioners became interested in the number of governmental bodies in the county, particularly those with taxing powers.

While this number includes general-purpose jurisdictions – such as the County, cities and villages -- it also includes some special districts. To assess the number of special districts with taxing powers and provide some means of comparison, the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) turned to a document prepared by the Illinois Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation (ICIC) in March 2003. This document, titled *Legislator's Guide to Local Governments in Illinois: Special Districts* (Research Memorandum No. 117), was intended to serve as an overview of special districts in the state.

The ICIC Data

The ICIC compiled its data with the intent of identifying the universe of special districts in Illinois and the service delivery responsibilities of each type. Special districts differ from general-purpose governments "such as counties and municipalities in that they provide a single service or group of services" (ICIC, 2003, p. iii). Since Illinois has more local units of government than any other state, the ICIC did not find it surprising that it also has more special districts, although they found it hard to identify the precise number.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported 3,068 special districts in Illinois in 1997, the last year for which this data was available to the ICIC for their 2003 study. However the Census Bureau uses a very broad definition of a special district that includes entities that do not have taxing authority, such as housing authorities and interstate road and bridge commissions. Some special districts, like the Mid-Illinois Medical District, are even explicitly excluded from having taxing authority in their establishing statutes.

Because of this, the ICIC opted to use a more restricted definition, focusing on special districts with some sort of taxing and spending power. The outcome was the identification of 36 districts of this type in use in Illinois at the time of their review. Even so, the ICIC cautioned that their list may not be 100 percent complete or accurate, and that past research they conducted found that “a small number of special districts exist only on paper, whether defunct but not disbanded or authorized but never organized, some districts remain on the books without apparent activity” (ICIC, p. iv).

Even though the ICIC data might not be complete, the fact that it was drawn from three sources (Census Bureau, Illinois Department of Revenue, and Office of the Illinois Comptroller) led the SSCRPC to believe that it still provided a basis upon which some information could be drawn and comparisons made. However, in reviewing the ICIC’s list of 36 special district types, the SSCRPC found that five were not applicable to the CEC’s work as they were specific to Chicago, Cook County, or the Metro East area. These included: the Metro Pier and Exhibition Authority in Chicago, the Cook County Forest Preserve District, the Metro East Mass Transit District, the Chicago Park District, and the Metro Sanitary District of Greater Chicago.

With the exclusion of these five types of special districts, 31 types of special district relevant to the CEC’s work remained. The ICIC typology and listing became the basis for a review of the number and types of special district in use in Sangamon County in comparison to three other central Illinois counties often used for benchmarking purposes: Champaign County, McLean County, and Peoria County¹.

SSCRPC Findings Based Upon ICIC Data

This comparison is shown in the table on page 5, below. Of the 31 relevant special district types remaining that were listed in the ICIC report, the SSCRPC found that 14, or almost half of them, were not being utilized in any of the four counties compared. These special districts were:

¹ This comparison can also be used in conjunction with an earlier SSCRPC report to the CEC: Uden, Amy (Oct. 13, 2011). *Local Government Expenditures and Efficiency in Sangamon County, Illinois*. SSCRPC: Springfield, IL.

- Conservation districts.
- Hospital districts.
- Regional transportation authorities.
- Mosquito abatement districts.
- Museum districts.
- County historical museum districts.
- Port districts.
- Rescue squad districts.
- River conservancy districts.
- Road districts.²
- Solid waste disposal districts.
- Surface water protection districts.
- Tuberculosis sanitarium districts.
- County water commissions.

On the other hand, eight of the 31 special district types were in use in all four of the counties compared. These types were:

- Drainage districts.
- Fire protection districts.
- Library districts.
- Multi-township assessment districts.
- Park districts.
- Sanitary districts.
- Soil and water conservation districts.
- Water service districts.

Overall, and at the time of the ICIC study, Sangamon County hosted 44 special districts that fell into 11 district types. The largest number of these were fire protection districts (24 districts of this type), with multi-township assessment districts (6) and library districts (5) being the second and third most numerous.

Peoria County hosted only a slightly smaller number (42), with these falling into 13 special district types. Similar to Sangamon County, the largest category was fire protection districts (11 in Peoria County), with library districts being the second most numerous (6). Four types held the third largest number of districts in Peoria County with four each.

Champaign County was found to host only 11 special district types, but these accounted for 128 special districts. This was due to the large number of drainage districts (81) in that county. If drainage districts were taken out of the

² It has been pointed out to the SSRPC that road districts *do* exist in the counties compared, as they exist as a function of townships. However, this paper is addressing “special districts” as defined by the ICIC. The ICIC seems to treat townships and their ancillary components as general units of government rather than “special districts”, and so are not included in this report. Readers should be aware that townships also function as road districts, but exist in addition to the “Road Districts” covered under the State statute cited in the table at the end of this *Information Brief*.

listing, Champaign County would have had only 47 identified special districts, or not a much greater number than hosted by Peoria and Sangamon counties.

Finally, McLean County was found to be hosting 13 types of special districts, accounting for 83 special districts in all. Unlike the drainage districts in Champaign County, there was no one district type in McLean County that caused this number to be twice that of Sangamon and Peoria Counties (or Champaign if drainage districts were removed from that count). There was one case where McLean hosted a type of district that the other three counties did not, five water authorities, but in general McLean simply had a larger number of districts than the other counties in the same district types.

Information compiled by Norm Sims, SSCRPC, and prepared for the Citizens' Efficiency Commission for Sangamon County.

Through the work of its professional staff, the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) provides overall planning services related to land use, housing, recreation, transportation, economic development, and environmental matters, as well as special projects of local and regional interest. The Commission that oversees this work is made up of 17 members including representatives from the Sangamon County Board, Springfield City Council, special units of government, and six appointed citizens from the City and County.

As part of its responsibilities, the SSCRPC serves as the joint planning body for the City of Springfield and Sangamon County. This work includes the review of proposed subdivisions of property and their development, making recommendations on all Springfield and County zoning and variance requests, overseeing the County's Zoning Department, and serving as the County's Floodplain Administrator.

Along with its on-going responsibilities to the City and County, the Commission also works with many other municipalities, public agencies, and public-private entities throughout the region to promote orderly growth and development. In carrying out its tasks, the SSCRPC conducts numerous research studies, analytic reviews and planning projects each year. In this regard it also acts in regional capacities, for example serving as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation planning and directing the development of the Sangamon Regional Comprehensive Plan.

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Table

Types of Special Districts in Sangamon, Champaign, McLean & Peoria Counties

	Sangamon	Champaign	McLean	Peoria
Airport Authorities [70 ILCS 5/1-5/21]	1		1	1
Cemetery Maintenance Districts [70 ILCS 105/1-105/12]			8	
Civic Center Authorities [70 ILCS 200/2-200/2-155]	1		2	2
Conservation Districts [70 ILCS 410/1-410/19]				
Drainage Districts [70 ILCS 605/3-1 – 605/12-24]	2	81	20	2
Fire Protection Districts [70 ILCS 705/0.01 – 705/24]	24	24	19	11
Forest Preserve Districts [70 ILCS 805/0.001 – 855/2]		1		
Hospital Districts [70 ILCS 910/1 – 910/25]				
Library Districts [75 ILCS 16/1-1 – 16/1-50]	5	3	7	6
Mass Transit Districts [70 ILCS 3610/1 – 3610/9]	1	1		1
Regional Transportation Authority [70 ILCS 3615/1.01 – 3615/5.05]				
Mosquito Abatement Districts [70 ILCS 1005/0.01 – 1005/13A]				
Multi-Township Assessment Districts [35 ILCS 200/2-5 – 2-80]	6	7	7	4
Museum Districts [70 ILCS 1105/0.01 – 1105/26]				
County Historical Museum Districts [55 ILCS 5/5-31001 – 5/5-31021]				
Park Districts [70 ILCS 1205/1-1 – 1205/13.9, 70 ILCS 1220/1 – 1325/1.1]	1	4	6	4
Port Districts [70 ILCS 1810/1 – 1820/35]				
Public Health Districts [70 ILCS 905/0.01 – 905/24]		1		
Rescue Squad Districts [70 ILCS 2005/1 – 2005/15]				
River Conservancy Districts [70 ILCS 2105/1 – 2110/1]				
Road Districts [605 ILCS 5/6-101 – 5/6-906]				
Sanitary Districts [various parts of 70 ILCS 2202, 2305, 2405, 2805 & 2905]	1	2	3	4
Soil & Water Conservation Districts [70 ILCS 405/1 – 405/42]	1	1	1	1
Solid Waste Disposal Districts [70 ILCS 3105/1 – 3105/24]				
Street Lighting Districts [70 ILCS 3305/0.01 – 3305/10.1]			1	1
Surface Water Protection Districts [70 ILCS 3405/0.01 – 3405/24]				
Tuberculosis Sanitarium Districts [70 ILCS 920/0.01 – 920/14]				
Water Authorities [70 ILCS 3715/1 – 3715/27]			5	
County Water Commissions [70 ILCS 3720/1 – 3720/5]				
Public Water Districts [70 ILCS 3705/0.01 – 3705/41]				1
Water Service Districts [70 ILCS 3710/0.01 – 3710/12]	1	3	3	4